THE STRANGE STORY OF ALLAN QUATERMAIN'S WIFE

By H. Rider Haggard

AUTHOR OF ALLAN QUATERMAIN SHE JESS

CHAPTER I.

IT MAY be remembered that in the last pages of his diary, written just before his death, Allan Quatermain makes allusion to his long dead wife, stating that he has written of her fully elsewhere.

When his death was known, his papers were handed to myself as his literary executor. Among them I found two manuscripts, of which the following is one. The other is simply a record of events in which Mr. Quatermain was not personally concerned—a Zulu novel, the story of which was told to him by the hero many years after the tragedy had occurred. But with this we have nothing to do at present.

I have often thought (Mr. Quatermain's manuscript begins) that I would set down on paper the events connected with my marriage, and the loss of my most dear wife. Many years have now passed since that event, and to some extent time has softened the old grief, though heaven knows it is still keen enough. On two or three occasions I have even begun the record. Once I gave it up because the writing of it depressed me beyond bearing, once because I suddenly was called away upon a journey, and the third time because a Kaffir boy found my manuscript convenient for lighting the kitchen fire.

But now that I am at leisure here in England, I will make a fourth attempt. If I succeed, the story may serve to interest some one in after years when I am dead and gone. It is a wild tale enough, and suggests some curious reflections.

I am the son of a missionary. My father was originally curate in charge of a small parish in Oxfordshire. He had already been some years married to my dear mother when he went there, and he had four children, of whom I was the youngest. I remember faintly the place where we lived. It was an ancient, long, gray house, facing the road. There was a very large tree of some sort in the garden. It was hollow, and we children used to play about inside of it, and knock knots of wood from the rough bark. We all slept in a kind of attic, and my mother always came up and kissed us when we were in bed. I used to wake up and see her bending over me, a candle in her hand. There was a curious kind of pole projecting from the wall over my bed. Once I was dreadfully frightened because my eldest brother made me hang to it by my hands. That is all I remember about our old home. It has been pulled down long ago, or I would journey there to see it.

A little further down the road was a large house with big iron gates to it, and on the top of the gate pillars sat two stone lions, which were so hideous that I was afraid of them. One could see the house by peeping through the bars of the gates. It was a gloomy looking place, with a tall yew hedge round it; but in the summer time some flowers grew round the sun dial in the grass plat. This house was called the Hall, and Squire Carson lived there. One Christmas—it must have been the Christmas before my father emigrated, or I should not remember it—we children went to a Christmas tree at the Hall. There was a great party there, and footmen wearing red waistcoats stood at the door. In the dining room, which was paneled with black oak, was the Christmas tree. Squire Carson stood in front of it. He was a tall, dark man, very quiet in his manners, and he wore a bunch of seals on his waistcoat. We used to think him old, but as a matter of fact he was then not more than forty. He had been, as I afterwards learned, a great traveler in his youth, but some six or seven years before this date had married a lady who was half a Spaniard—a papist, my father called her.

I can remember her well. She was small and very pretty, with a rounded figure, large black eyes and glittering teeth. She spoke English with a curious accent. I suppose that I must have been a funny child to look at, and I know that my hair stood up on my head then as it does now, for I still have a sketch of myself that my mother made of me, in which this peculiarity is strongly marked. On this occasion of the Christmas tree I remember that Mrs. Carson turned to a tall, foreign looking gentleman who stood beside her, and tapping him affectionately on the shoulder with her gold eyeglasses said:

"Look, cousin—look at that droll little boy with the big brown eyes; his hair is like a—what you call him?—scrubbing brush. Oh, what a droll little boy!"

The tall gentleman pulled at his mustache, and, taking Mrs. Carson's hand in his, began to smooth my hair down with it till I heard her whisper:

"Leave go my hand, cousin. Thomas is looking like—like the thunderstorm."

Thomas was the name of Mr. Carson, her husband.

After that I hid myself as well as I could behind a chair, for I was shy, and watched little Stella Carson, who was the squire's only child, giving the children presents off the tree. She was dressed as Father Christmas, with some soft, white stuff round her lovely little face, and had large, dark eyes, which I thought more beautiful than anything I had ever seen. At last it came to my turn to have a present—oddly enough, considered in the light of future events, it was a large monkey. She reached it down from one of the lower boughs of the tree and handed it to me, saying:

"Dat is my Christmas present to you, little Allan Quatermain."

As she did so, her sleeve, which was covered with cotton wool, spangled over with something that shone, touched one of the tapers—how I do not know—and caught fire, and the flame ran up her arm towards her throat. She stood quite still. I suppose that she was paralyzed with fear; and the ladies who were near screamed very loud, but did nothing. Then some impulse seized me—perhaps instinct would be a better word to use, considering my age. I threw myself upon the child, and, beating at the fire with my hands, mercifully succeeded in extinguishing it before it really got hold. My wrists were so badly burned that they had to be wrapped up in wool for a long time afterwards, but with the exception of a single burn upon her throat, little Stella Carson was not much hurt.

This is all that I remember about the Christmas tree at the hall. What happened afterwards is lost to me, but to this day in my sleep I often see little Stella's sweet face and the stare of terror in her dark eyes as the fire ran up her arm. This, however, is not wonderful, for I had, humanly speaking, saved the life of her who was destined to be my wife.

The next event which I can recall clearly is that my mother and three brothers all fell ill of fever, owing, as I afterwards learned, to the poisoning of our well by some evil minded person, who threw a dead sheep into it.

It must have been while they were ill that Squire Carson came one day to the vicarage. The weather was still cold, for there was a fire in the study, and I sat before the fire writing letters on a piece of paper with a pencil, while my father walked up and down the room, talking to himself. Afterwards I knew that he was praying for the lives of his wife and children. Presently a servant came to the door and said that some one wanted to see him.

"It is the squire, sir," said the maid, "and he says he particularly wishes to see you."

"Very well," answered my father, wearily, and presently Squire Carson came in. His face was white and haggard, and his eyes shone so fiercely that I was afraid of him.

"Forgive me for intruding on you at such a time, Quatermain," he said, in a hoarse voice, "but to-morrow I leave this place forever, and I wish to speak to you before I go—indeed, I must speak to you."

"Shall I send Allan away?" said my father, pointing to me.

"No, let him bide. He will not understand." Nor, indeed, did I at the time, but I remembered every word, and in after years their meaning grew on me.

"First tell me," he went on, "how are they?" and he pointed upwards with his thumb.

"My wife and two of the boys are beyond hope," my father answered, with a groan. "I do not know how it will go with the third. The Lord's will be done!"

"The Lord's will be done," the squire echoed, solemnly. "And now, Quatermain, listen—my wife's gone."

"Gone!" my father answered. "Who with?"

"With that foreign cousin of hers. It seems from a letter she left that she always cared for him, not for me. She married me because she thought me a rich English milord. Now she has run through my property, or most of it, and gone. I don't know where. Luckily, she did not care to encumber her new career with the child; Stella is left to me."

"That is what comes of marrying a papist, Carson," said my father. That was his fault; he was as good and charitable a man as ever lived, but he was bigoted. "What are you going to do—follow her?"

He laughed bitterly in answer.

"Follow her!" he said: "why should I follow her? If I met her I might kill her or him, or both of them, because of the shame they have brought upon my child's name. No, I never want to look upon her face again. I trusted her, I tell you, and she has betrayed me. Let her go and find her fate. But I am going too. I am weary of my life."

"Surely, Carson, surely," said my father, "you do not mean"——

"No, no: not that. Death comes soon enough. But I will leave this civilized world that is a living lie. We will go right away into the wilds, my child and I, and hide our shame. Where? I don't know where. Anywhere so long as there are no white faces, no smooth, educated tongues."

"You are mad, Carson," my father answered. "How will you live? How will you educate Stella? Be a man and live it down."

"I will be a man, and I will live it down, but not here, Quatermain. Education! Was not she—that woman who was my wife—was not she highly educated?—the cleverest woman in the country forsooth. Too clever for me, Quatermain—too clever by half. No, no, Stella shall be brought up in a different school; if it be possible, she shall forget her very name. Good-by, old friend, good-by for ever. Do not try to find me out, henceforth I shall be like one dead to you, to you and all I knew," and he was gone.

"Mad," said my father, with a heavy sigh. "His trouble has turned his brain. But he will think better of it."

At that moment the nurse came hurrying in and whispered something in his ear. My father's face turned deadly pale. He clutched at the table to support himself, then staggered from the room. My mother was dying.

It was some days afterwards, I do not know exactly how long, that my father took me by the hand and led me upstairs into the big room that had been my mother's bedroom. There she lay, dead in her coffin, with flowers in her hand. Along the wall of the room were arranged three little white beds, and on each of the beds lay one of my brothers. They all looked as though they were asleep, and they all had flowers in their hands. My father told me to kiss them all, because I should not see them any more, and I did so, though I was very frightened. I did not know why. Then he took me in his arms and kissed me.

"The Lord hath given," he said, "and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

I cried very much, and he took me downstairs, and after that I have only a confused memory of men dressed in black carrying heavy burdens towards the gray churchyard.

Next comes a vision of a great ship and wide tossing waters. My father could no longer bear to live in England after the loss that had fallen on him, and made up his mind to emigrate to South Africa. We must have been poor at the time; indeed, I believe that a large portion of our income went from my father on my mother's death. At any rate we traveled with the steerage passengers, and the intense discomfort of the journey with the rough ways of our fellow emigrants still remain upon my mind. At last it came to an end, and we reached Africa, which I was not to leave again for many, many years. In those days civilization had not made any great progress in southern Africa. My father went up the country and became a missionary among the Kaffirs, near to where the town of Cradock now stands, and here I grew to manhood. There were a few Boer farmers in the neighborhood, and gradually a little settlement of whites gathered round our mission station—a drunken Scotch blacksmith and wheelwright was about the most interesting character, who, when he was sober, could quote the Scottish poet Burns and the "Ingoldsby Legends" literally by the page. It was from him that I contracted a fondness for the latter amusing writings which has never left me.

Burns I never cared for so much, probably because of the Scottish dialect, which repelled me. What little education I got was from my father, but I never had much leaning toward books, nor he much time to teach them to me. On the other hand, I was always a keen observer of the ways of men and nature. By the time that I was 20 I could speak Dutch and three or four Kaffir dialects perfectly, and I doubt if there was anybody in South Africa who understood native ways of thought and action more completely than I did. Also I was really a good shot and horseman, and I think—as, indeed, my subsequent career proves to have been the case—a great deal tougher than the majority of men.

It may be wondered that I did not run absolutely wild in such surroundings, but I was held back from this by my father's society. He was one of the gentlest and most refined men that I ever met; even the most savage Kaffir loved him, and his influence was a very good one for me. He used to call himself one of the world's failures. Would that there were more such failures. Every evening when his work was done he would take his prayer book, and, sitting on the little stoop of our station, would read the evening psalms to himself. Sometimes there was not light enough for this, but it made no difference, he knew them all by heart. When he had finished he would look out across the cultivated lands where the mission Kaffirs had their huts.

But I knew it was not these he saw, but rather the gray English church, and the graves ranged side by side before the yew near the wicket gate.

It was there on the stoop that he died. He had not been well, and one evening I was talking to him, and his mind went back to Oxfordshire and my mother. He spoke of her a good deal, saying that she had never been out of his mind for a single day during all these years, and that he rejoiced to think he was drawing near that land whither she had gone. Then he asked me if I remembered that night when Squire Carson came into the study at the vicarage, and told him that his wife had run away, and that he was going to change his name and bury himself in some remote land.

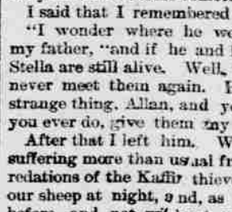
I said that I remembered it perfectly.

"I wonder where he went to," said my father, "and if he and his daughter Stella are still alive. Well, well! I shall never meet them again. But life is a strange thing, Allan, and you may. If you ever do, give them my kind love."

After that I left him. We had been suffering more than usual from the depredations of the Kaffir thieves, who stole our sheep at night, and, as I had done before, and not without success, I had determined to watch in the kraal and see if I could catch them. Indeed, it was from this habit of mine of watching at night that I first got my native name of Macumazahn, which may be roughly translated as "he who sleeps with one eye open." So I took my rifle and rose to go. But he called me to him and kissed me on the forehead, saying, "God bless you, Allan. I hope that you will think of your old father sometimes, and that you will lead a good and happy life."

I remember that I did not much like his tone at the time, but set it down to an attack of low spirits, to which he grew very subject as the years went on. I went down to the kraal and watched till within an hour of sunrise, then, as no thieves appeared, returned to the station. As I came near I was astonished to see a figure sitting in my father's chair. At first I thought it must be a drunken Kaffir, then that my father had fallen asleep there. And so he had, indeed, for he was dead!

CHAPTER II.



WHEN I had buried my father, and seen his successor installed in his place—for the station was the property of the society—I set to work to carry out a plan which I had long cherished, but been unable to execute, because it involved separation from my father. Put shortly, it was to undertake a trading journey of exploration right through the countries now known as the Free State and the Transvaal, and as much further north as I could go. It was an adventurous scheme, for, though the emigrant Boers had begun to occupy positions in these territories, they were still to all practical purposes unexplored. But I was now alone in the world, and it mattered little what became of me; so, driven on by the overmastering love of adventure, which, old as I am, will perhaps still be my cause of death, I determined to undertake it.

Accordingly I sold such stock and goods as we had upon the station, reserving only the two best wagons and two pairs of oxen. The proceeds I invested in such goods as were then in fashion for trading purposes, and in guns and ammunition. The guns would have moved any modern explorer to merriment; but such as they were I managed to do a good deal of execution with them. One of them was a single barreled, smooth bore, fitted for percussion caps—a roer we called it—which threw a three-ounce ball, and was charged with a handful of coarse black powder. Many is the elephant that I killed with that roer, although it generally knocked me backwards when I fired it, which I only did under compulsion. The best of the lot, perhaps, was a double barreled No. 12 shot gun, but it had flint locks. Also, there were some old tower muskets, which might or might not throw straight at seventy yards. I took six Kaffirs with me, and three good horses, which were supposed to be salted—that is, proof against sickness. Among the Kaffirs was an old fellow named Indaba-zimbi, which, being translated, means "tongue of iron."

I suppose he got this name from his strident voice and exhaustless eloquence. This man was a great character in his way. He had been a noted witch-doctor among a neighboring tribe, and came to the station under the following circumstances, which, as he plays a considerable part in this history, are perhaps worth recording.

Two years before my father's death I had occasion to search the country round for some lost oxen. After a long and useless quest it occurred to me that I had better go to the place where the oxen were bred by a Kaffir chief, whose name I forgot, but whose kraal was about fifty miles from our station. There I went, and found the oxen safe at home. The chief entertained me handsomely, and on the following morning I went to pay my respects to him before leaving, and was somewhat surprised to find a collection of some hundreds of men and women sitting round him anxiously watching the sky, in which the thunder-clouds were banking up in a very ominous way.

"You had better wait, white man," said the chief, "and see the rain doctors fight the lightning."

I inquired what he meant, and learned that this man, Indaba-zimbi, had for some years occupied the position of wizard-in-chief to the tribe, although he was not a member of it, having been born in the country now known as Zululand. But a son of the chief's, a man of about 30, had lately set up as a rival in supernatural powers. This irritated Indaba-zimbi beyond measure, and a quarrel ensued between the two witch doctors that resulted in a challenge to trial by lightning being given and accepted. These were the conditions. The rivals must await the coming of a serious thunderstorm, no ordinary tempest would serve their turn. Then, carrying assegais in their hands, they must take their stand within fifty paces of each other upon a certain patch of ground where the big thunderbolts were observed to strike continually, and by the exercise of their occult powers and invocations to the lightning, must strive to avert death from themselves and bring it on their rival. The terms of this singular match had been arranged a month previously, but no storm worthy of the occasion had arisen. Now the local weather prophets believed it to be brewing.

I inquired what would happen if neither of the men were struck, and was told that they must then wait for another storm. If they escaped the second time, however, they would be held to be equal in power, and be jointly consulted by the tribe on occasions of importance.

The prospect of being a spectator of so unusual a sight overcame my desire to be gone, and I accepted the chief's invitation to see it out. Before midday I regretted it, for though the western heavens grew darker and darker, and the still air heralded the coming of the storm, yet it did not come. By 4 o'clock it became obvious that it must burst soon—at sunset, the old chief said, and in the company of the whole assembly I moved down to the place of combat. The kraal was built on the top of a hill, and below it the land sloped gently to the banks of a river about half a mile away. On the hither side of the bank was the piece of land that was, the natives said, "loved of the lightning." Here the magicians took up their stand, while the spectators grouped themselves on the hillside about two hundred yards away, which was, I thought, rather too near to be pleasant.

When we had sat there for awhile my curiosity overcame me, and I asked leave of the chief to go down and inspect the arena. He said I might do so at my own risk. I told him that the fire from above would not hurt white men, and went and found that it was a bed of iron ore, thinly covered with grass, which of course accounted for its attracting the lightning from the storms as they traveled along the line of the river. At each end of this ironstone area were placed the combatants, Indaba-zimba facing the east, and his rival the west, and before each there burned a little fire made of some scented root. Moreover, they were dressed in all the paraphernalia of their craft, snake skins, fish bladders, and I know not what besides, while round their necks hung circlets of baboons' teeth and bones from human hands. First I went to the western end where the chief's son stood. He was pointing with his assegai towards the advancing storm and invoking it in a voice of great excitement.

"Come, fire, and lick up Indaba-zimbi!

"Hear me, Storm Devil, and lick Indaba-zimbi with your red tongue!

"Spit on him with your rain!

"Whirl him away in your breath!

"Make him as nothing—melt the marrow in his bones!

"Run into his heart and burn away the lies!

"Show all the people who is the true Witch Finder!

"Let me not be put to shame in the eyes of this white man!"

To this he spoke, or rather chanted, and all the while rubbed his broad chest—for he was a very fine man—with some filthy compound of medicine ai monti.

After a while, getting tired of his song, I walked across the ironstone, to where Indaba-zimbi sat by his fire. He was not chanting at all, but his performance was much more impressive. It consisted in staring at the eastern sky, which was perfectly clear of cloud, and every now and again beckoning at it with his finger, then turning round to point with the assegai towards his rival. For a while I looked at him in silence. He was a curious wizened man, apparently over fifty years of age, with thin hands that looked as tough as wire. His nose was much sharper than is usual among these races, and he had a queer habit of holding his head sideways like a bird when he spoke, which, in addition to the humor that lurked in his eye, gave him a most comical appearance. Another strange thing about him was that he had a single white lock of hair among his black wool. At last I spoke to him:

"Indaba-zimbi, my friend," I said, "you may be a good witch doctor, but you are certainly a fool. It is no good beckoning at the blue sky while your enemy is getting a start with the storm."

"You may be clever, but don't think you know everything, white man," the old fellow answered, in a high cracked voice, and with something like a grin.

"They call you Irontongue," I went on; "you had better use it, or the Storm Devil won't hear you."

"The fire from above runs down iron," he answered, "so I keep my tongue quiet. Oh, yes, let him curse away, I'll put him out presently. Look now, white man."

I looked, and in the eastern sky there grew a cloud. At first it was small, but very black, but it gathered with extraordinary rapidity.

This was odd enough, but as I had seen the same thing happen before it did not particularly astonish me. It is by no means unusual in Africa for two thunderstorms to come up at the same time from different points of the compass.

"You had better go on, Indaba-zimbi," I said, "the big storm is coming along fast, and will soon eat up that baby of yours," and I pointed to the west.

"Babies sometimes grow to giants, white man," said Indaba-zimbi, beckoning away vigorously. "Look now at my cloud-child."

I looked; the eastern storm had spread itself from earth to sky, and in shape resembled an enormous man. There was its head, its shoulders, and its legs; yes, it was like a huge giant traveling across the heavens. The light of the setting sun escaping from beneath the lower edge of the western storm shot across the intervening space in a sheet of splendor, and, lighting up the advancing figure, wrapped its middle in hues of glory, too wonderful to be described; but beneath and above this glowing belt his feet and head were black as jet. Presently, as I watched, an awful flash of light shot from the head of the cloud and circled it about as though with a crown of living fire and vanished.

"Aha," chuckled old Indaba-zimbi, "my little boy is putting on his man's ring," and he tapped the green ring on his own head, which natives assume when they reach a certain age and dignity. "Now, white man, unless you are a bigger wizard than either of us you had better clear off, for the fire fight is about to begin."

I thought this sound advice.

"Good luck go with you, my black uncle," I said. "I hope you don't feel the iniquities of a misspent life weighing on you at the last."

"You look after yourself, and think of your own sins, young man," he answered, with a grim smile, and taking a pinch of snuff, and at that very moment a flash of lightning, I don't know from which storm, struck the ground within thirty paces of me. That was enough for me. I fairly took to my heels, and as I went I heard old Indaba-zimbi's dry chuckle of amusement.

I climbed the hill till I came to where the chief was sitting with his Indunas, and sat down near to him. I looked at the man's face and saw that he was intensely anxious for his son's safety, and by no means confident of his powers to resist the magic of Indaba-zimbi. He was talking in a low voice to the Induna next to him.

"Hearken!" the chief was saying, "if the magic of Indaba-zimbi prevails against my son, I will endure him no more. Of this I am sure, that when he has slain my son he will slay me, me also, and make himself chief in my place. I fear Indaba-zimbi. Oh!"

"Black one," answered the Induna, "wizards die as dogs die, and, once dead, dogs bark no more."

"And once dead," said the chief, "wizards work no more spells," and he bent and whispered in the Induna's ear, looking at the assegai in his hand as he whispered.

"Good, my father, good!" said the Induna, presently. "It shall be done to-night, if the lightning does not do it first."

"A bad lookout for old Indaba-zimbi," I said to myself. "They mean to kill him." Then I thought no more of the matter for a while—the scene before me was too tremendous.

The two storms were rapidly rushing together.

The silence deepened and deepened, the shadows grew blacker and blacker, then suddenly all nature began to moan beneath the breath of an icy wind. On came the wind; the smooth surface of the river was ruffled by it into little waves, the tall grass bowed low before it, and in its wake came the hissing sound of furious rain.

Ah! the storms had met. From each there burst an awful dazzling blaze of light, and now the hill on which we sat rocked in the noise of the following thunder. The light went out of the sky, darkness fell suddenly on the land, but not for long. Presently the whole landscape grew vivid in the flashes; it appeared and disappeared; now everything was visible for miles, now even the men at my side vanished in the blackness.

Suddenly the thunder and lightning ceased for a minute, and everything grew black, and, except for the rain, silent.

"It is over, one way or the other, chief," I called out into the darkness.

"Wait, white man, wait," answered the chief in a voice thick with anxiety and fear.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when the heavens were lit up again till they literally seemed to flame. There were the men, not four paces apart. A great flash fell between them; I saw them stagger beneath the shock. Indaba-zimbi recovered himself first—at any rate, when the next flash came he was standing bolt upright, pointing with his assegai towards his enemy. The chief's son was still on his legs, but he was staggering like a drunken man, and the assegai had fallen from his hand.

Darkness, then again a flash, more fearful, if possible, than any that had gone before. To me it seemed to come from the east, right over the head of Indaba-zimbi. Next instant I saw the chief's son wrapped, as it were, in the heart of it. Then the thunder pealed, the rain burst over us like a torrent, and I saw no more.

The worst of the storm was done, but for a while the darkness was so dense that we could not move, nor, indeed, was I inclined to leave the safety of the hillside where the lightning was never known to strike and venture down to the ironstone. Occasionally there still came flashes, but, search as we would, we could see no trace of either of the wizards. For my part, I believed that they were both dead. Now the clouds slowly rolled away down the course of the river, and with it went the rain; and now the stars shone out in their wake.

"Let us go and see," said the old chief, rising and shaking the water from his hair. "The fire fight has ended, let us go and see who has conquered."

I rose and followed him, dripping as though I had swum a hundred yards with my clothes on, and after me came all the people of the kraal.

We reached the spot; even in that light I could see where the ironstone had been split and fused by the thunderbolts. While I was looking about me, I suddenly heard the chief, who was on my right, give a low moan, and saw the people cluster round him. I went up and looked. There, on the ground, lay the body of his son. He was a dreadful sight. His hair was burned off his head, the copper rings upon his arms were fused, the assegai handle which lay near was literally shivered into threads, and, when I took hold of his arm, it seemed to me that every bone of it was broken.

The men with the chief stood gazing silently, while the women wailed.

"Great is the magic of Indaba-zimbi," said a man at length. The chief turned and struck him a heavy blow with the kerrie in his hand.

"Great or not, thou dog, he shall die," he cried, "and so shalt thou if thou singest his praises so loudly."

I said nothing, but thinking it probable that Indaba-zimbi had shared the fate of his enemy, went to look. But I could see nothing of him, and at length, being thoroughly chilled with the wet, started back to my wagon to get a change of clothes. On reaching it, I was rather surprised to see a strange Kaffir seated on the driving box wrapped up in a blanket.

"Hullo! come out of that," I said.

The figure on the box slowly unrolled the blanket, and with great deliberation took a pinch of snuff.

"It was a good fire fight, white man, was it not?" said Indaba-zimbi, in his high, cracked voice. "But he never had a chance against me, poor boy. He knew nothing about it. See, white man, what comes of presumption in the young. It is sad, very sad, but I made the flashes fly, didn't I?"

"You old humbug," I said, "unless you are careful you will soon learn what comes of presumption in the old, for your chief is after you with an assegai, and it will take all your magic to dodge that."

"Now you don't say so," said Indaba-zimbi, clambering off the wagon with rapidity; "and all because of this wretched upstart. There's gratitude for you, white man. I expose him, and they want to kill me. Well, thank you for the hint. We shall meet again before long," and he was gone like a shot, and not too soon, for just then some men came up to the wagon.

On the following morning I started homewards. The first face I saw on arriving at the station was that of Indaba-zimbi.

"How do you do, Macumazahn?" he said, holding his head on one side and nodding his white lock. "I hear you are Christians here, and I want to try a new religion. Mine must be a bad one, seeing that my people wanted to kill me for exposing an impostor."

CHAPTER III.

I MAKE no apology to myself, or to anybody who may happen to read this narrative in future, for having set out the manner of my meeting with Indaba-zimbi; first, because it was curious, and secondly, because he takes some hand in the subsequent events. If that old man was a humbug, he was a very clever one. What amount of truth there was in his pretensions of supernatural powers it is not for me to determine, though I may have my own opinion on the subject. But there was no mistake as to the extraordinary influence he exercised over his fellow-natives.

When I was at length ready to start upon my expedition I went to old Indaba-zimbi to say good-by to him, and was rather surprised to find him engaged in rolling up medicine, assegais, and other sundries in his blankets.

"Good-by, Indaba-zimbi," I said, "I am going to trek north."

"Yes, Macumazahn," he answered, with his head on one side: "and so am I—I want to see that country. We will go together."

"Will we!" I said; "wait till you are asked, you old humbug."

"You had better ask me, then, Macumazahn, for if you don't you will never come back alive. Now that the old chief (my father) is gone to where the storms come from," and he nodded to the sky, "I feel myself getting into bad habits again. So last night I just threw up the bones and worked out about your journey, and I can tell you this, that if you don't take me you will die, and, what is more, you will lose one who is dearer to you than life."

Now I was no more superstitious than other people, but somehow old Indaba-zimbi impressed me. Also, I knew his extraordinary influence over every class of native, and bethought me that he might be useful in that way.

"All right," I said; "I appoint you witchfinder to the expedition without pay."

"First serve, then ask for wages," he answered. "I am glad to see that you have enough imagination not to be altogether a fool, like most white men, Macumazahn. Yes, yes, it is want of imagination that makes people fools; they won't believe what they can't understand. You can't understand my prophecies any more than the fool at the kraal could understand that I was his master with the lightning. Well, it is time to trek, but if I were you, Macumazahn, I should take one wagon, not two."

"Why?" I said.

"Because you will lose your wagons, and it is better to lose one than two."

"Oh, nonsense!" I said.

"All right, Macumazahn, live and learn." And without another word he walked to the foremost wagon, put his bundle into it, and climbed into the front seat.

So, having bid an affectionate adieu to my white friends, at length I started, and traveled slowly northwards. For the first three weeks nothing very particular befell me. Such Kaffirs as we came in contact with were friendly, and game literally swarmed.

The first real adventure that befell me on this particular journey was with elephants, which I will relate because of its curious termination. Just before we crossed the Orange river we came to a stretch of forest land some twenty miles broad. The night we entered this forest we camped in a lovely open glade. A few yards ahead tambouki grass was growing to the height of a man, or rather it had been; now, with the exception of a few stalks here and there, it was crushed quite flat. It was already dusk when we camped; but after the moon got up I walked from the fire to see how this had happened. One glance was enough for me; a great herd of elephants had evidently passed over the tall grass not many hours before. The sight of their spoor rejoiced me exceedingly, for though I had seen wild elephants, at that time I had never shot one. Moreover, the sight of elephant spoor to the African hunter is what "color in the pan" is to the prospector of gold. It is by ivory that he lives, and to shoot it or trade it is his chief aim in life. My resolution was soon taken. I would camp the wagons for a while in the forest, and start on horseback after the elephants.

I communicated my decision to Indaba-zimbi and the other Kaffirs. The latter were not loth, for your Kaffir loves hunting, which means plenty of meat and congenial occupation, but Indaba-zimbi would express no opinion. I saw him retire to a little fire that he had lit for himself, and go through some mysterious performances with bones and clay mixed with ashes, which were watched with the greatest interest by the other Kaffirs. At length he rose, and, coming forward, informed me that it was all right, and that I did well to go and hunt the elephants, as I should get plenty of ivory; but he advised me to go on foot. I said I should do nothing of the sort, but meant to ride. I am wiser now; that was the first and last time that I ever attempted to hunt elephants on horseback.

Accordingly, we started at dawn, I, Indaba-zimbi and three men; the rest I left with the wagons. I was on horseback and so was my driver, a good rider and a skillful shot for a Kaffir, but Indaba-zimbi and the others walked. From dawn till midday we followed the trail of the herd, which was as plain as a high road. Then we off saddled to let the horses rest and feed, and about 3 o'clock started on again. Another hour or so passed, and still there was no sign of elephants. Evidently the herd had traveled fast and far, and I began to think that we should have to give it up, when suddenly I caught sight of a brown mass moving through the thorn trees on the side of a slope about a quarter of a mile away. My heart seemed to jump into my mouth. Where is the hunter who has not felt like this at the sight of his first elephant? I called a halt, and then, the wind being right, we set to work to stalk the bull.

Very quietly I rode down the hither side of the slope till we came to the bottom, which was densely covered with bush. Here I saw the elephants had been feeding, for broken branches and uptorned trees lay all about. I did not take much notice, however, for all my thoughts were fixed upon the bull I was stalking, when suddenly my horse made a violent start that nearly threw me from the saddle, and there came a mighty rush and upheaval of something in front of me. I looked: there was the hinder part of a second bull elephant not four yards off. I could just catch sight of its outstretched ears projecting on either side. I had disturbed it sleeping, and it was running away. Obviously the best thing to do would have been to let it run, but I was young in those days and foolish, and in the excitement of the moment I lifted my "roer" or elephant gun and fired at the great brute over my horse's head. The recoil of the heavy gun nearly knocked me off the horse.

I recovered myself, however, and as I did so, saw the bull lurch forward, for the impact of a three ounce bullet in the flanks will quicken the movements even of an elephant. By this time I had realized the folly of the shot, and devoutly hoped that the bull would take no further notice of it. But he had a different view of the matter. Pulling himself up in a series of plunges, he spun around and came for me with outstretched ears and uplifted trunk, screaming terribly. I was quite defenseless, for my gun was empty, and my first thought was of escape. I dug my heels into the sides of my horse, but he would not move an inch. The poor animal was paralyzed with terror, and he simply stood still, his forelegs outstretched, and quivering all over like a leaf.

On rushed the elephant, awful to see; I made one more vain effort to stir the horse. Now the trunk of the great bull swung aloft above my head. A thought flashed through my brain. Quick as light I rolled from the saddle. By the side of the horse lay a fallen tree, as thick through as a man's body. The tree was lifted a little off the ground by the broken boughs which took its weight, and with a single movement, so active is one in such necessities, I flung myself beneath it. As I did so, I heard the trunk of the elephant descend with a mighty thud on the back of my poor horse, and the next instant I was almost in darkness, for the horse, whose back was broken, fell over across the tree under which I lay ensconced. But he did not stop there long. In ten seconds more the bull had got his trunk round my dead nag's neck, and, with a mighty effort, hurled him clear of the tree. I wriggled backwards as far as I could towards the roots of the tree, for I knew what he was after.

Presently I saw the red tip of the bull's trunk stretching itself towards me. If he could manage to hook it round any part of me I was lost. But in the position I occupied, that was just what he could not do, although he knelt down to facilitate his operations. On came the snapping tip like a great open-mouthed snake; it closed upon my hat, which vanished. Again it was thrust down, and a scream of rage was bellowed through it within four inches of my head. Now it seemed to elongate itself. Oh, heavens! now it had me by the hair, which, luckily for myself, was not very long. Then it was my turn to scream, for next instant half a square inch of hair was dragged from my scalp by the roots. I was being plucked alive, as I have seen cruel Kaffir kitchen boys pluck a fowl. The operation, however,

TO BE CONTINUED.